

A Case Study of Preferential Bestiality (Zoophilia)

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Humans show a wide array of sexual preferences and behaviors. Although most humans prefer and have sex with consenting adults of the opposite sex, some individuals have unconventional preferences with regard to the sex or age of sexual partners, or with regard to the nature of sexual activities. In this paper, we describe a rare case of preferential bestiality, or zoophilia. The client meets the most stringent criteria for the diagnosis of zoophilia. In particular, his phallometrically measured arousal pattern shows a sexual preference for horses over other species, including humans.

KEY WORDS: bestiality; zoophilia; phallometry.

The fellow is a pig, and shall be reduced to the infantry

Frederick the Great, speaking of a cavalryman who had sex with a mare

INTRODUCTION

Humans show a wide array of sexual preferences and behaviors, and in this regard may be quite unique in the animal world. Although most humans prefer and have sex with consenting adults of the opposite sex, some individuals have unconventional preferences with regard to the sex or age of sexual partners, or with regard to the nature of sexual activities. A large number of paraphilias have been described and catalogued, ranging from fetishism (the preferential use of particular objects for sexual gratification) to pedophilia (a sexual preference for children).

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A Darwinian view of variation in human sexual preferences leads to the straightforward prediction that there should be a direct relationship between the reproductive viability of sexual preferences and their observed population frequency. The logic is simple. The most reproductively viable sexual preferences are most likely to be passed on to future generations.

By this account, one type of sexual behavior that is expected to be rare is sex with nonhuman animals (bestiality). Even rarer should be a *preference* for sex with nonhuman animals (preferential bestiality or zoophilia). A clear case of preferential bestiality would meet the following criteria: (1) the individual reports intense and recurrent sexual fantasies and urges about having sexual interactions with nonhuman animals, or reports repeated sexual interactions with nonhuman animals accompanied by strong sexual arousal; (2) the individual chooses sexual interactions with nonhuman animals even when willing human partners are available; (3) using objective measures, the individual shows greater sexual arousal to images of members of a nonhuman species than to images of humans, or shows greater sexual arousal to descriptions of sexual interactions with members of a nonhuman species than to descriptions of sexual interactions with humans.

There have been many interesting clinical descriptions of individuals who have had sex with animals, but very few of these descriptions have met the first two criteria for the identification of zoophilia. No reported cases have met all three. von Krafft-Ebing (1950) described, in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a few cases that may have been zoophiles. A 16-year-old “imbecile” stated that he sexually preferred rabbits to women. A severely epileptic man of limited intelligence had “inclinations neither for women nor for men, but for animals (fowls, horses, etc.)” (p. 565). Another man recounted that “bestial acts gave him greater lustful satisfaction than *coitus cum femina*” (p. 566). A man with a high social position was disgusted by coitus with women, “whilst *cum bestia* he experienced the height of pleasure” (p. 569). Finally, von Krafft-Ebing described an intelligent and well-educated man who could not obtain erections during coitus with women, but could obtain them from looking at or thinking about men on horses. He once ejaculated while riding a horse.

Based on these and other case studies, von Krafft-Ebing concluded that “violation of animals, monstrous and revolting as it seems to mankind, is by no means always due to psycho-pathological conditions. Low morality and great sexual desire, with lack of opportunity for natural indulgence, are the principal motives of this unnatural means of sexual satisfaction . . .” (p. 561). He also mentioned that “perversions” much further removed from the “normal object” are much graver conditions.

In their extensive study of male sexuality, Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) noted that contacts with animals occurred mostly among farm boys (presumably because of easier access to animals), and mostly between the ages of 10 and 12. Even for these individuals, animal contacts were infrequent, and only 17% of them reached orgasm as a result of the contacts. Kinsey et al. suggested that

“to a considerable extent contacts with animals are substitutes for heterosexual relations with human females” (p. 675) and that “such activities are biologically and psychologically part of the normal mammalian picture” (p. 677).

In a study of sexual offenders, Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, and Christenson (1965) suggested that men who report contacts with animals have an unusually active sex life and are “willing to try anything for kicks” (p. 168). Gebhard et al. hypothesized that animal contacts may be seen as not “something unique and separate, but as a form of self-masturbation” (p. 290).

Masters (1969) reported autobiographical letters from two men who were greatly aroused by the idea of having sex with animals, and engaged in life-long bestiality even though human partners were available to them. Yet, Masters considered that “man’s sexual experiences with the lower animals represent a diversion . . . rather than a perversion” (p. 191). He noted that “only very rarely is the animal contact a product of sexual deviation in the sense that the person’s desires are exclusively or customarily and preferentially, and for reasons beyond his or her control, directed toward animals rather than toward human partners. Rather, in all but a tiny minority of cases, bestiality is engaged in for other reasons. It may be a substitute or supplemental type of sex outlet, as masturbation is for many persons” (p. 190). Money (1986) concurred, writing that “zoophilia as a genuine paraphilia is probably rare. Most instances of sexual contact with another species do not exclude, or take the place of person-to-person pairbonding” (p. 99).

More recently, a review of 96 cases of people who had engaged in sexual fantasy or sexual behavior involving animals could not identify a single person who reported a preference for contacts with animals (Spitzer, Gibbon, Skodol, Williams, & First, 1989). However, McNally and Lukach (1991) reported on the assessment and treatment of a mildly retarded man who exposed himself to dogs. He reported that “he preferred to masturbate in front of large dogs of either sex” even though he “had a series of satisfactory sexual relationships with women” (p. 282).

One study came close to testing all three criteria mentioned earlier. Cooper, Swaminath, Baxter, and Poulin (1990) reported objective sexual arousal data collected from a female sex offender who had engaged in and fantasized about sex with family pets. The measure used was vaginal photoplethysmography, but the stimuli did not include animals. In the following case study, we test all three criteria for preferential bestiality on a man who received a criminal sentence for killing a female horse while engaging in sexual acts with it.

METHOD

Subject. The subject was a 54-year-old white male incarcerated in a medium security federal penitentiary. He was referred for assessment to the Sexual Behaviour Clinic operating within the institution. At the time of testing, the subject was serving a 5-year sentence for cruelty toward animals. His criminal history

revealed that he was serving his fourth sentence for similar offences against animals. In each offence, the target was a horse. He had no other convictions. The subject was the oldest in a family of seven children. He grew up on a farm, and at an early age was given responsibility for the care and feeding of the farm animals. He reported that he was unaware of when his sexual attraction toward animals developed. However, he stated that he engaged in a wide variety of sexual acts, starting with chickens and finally settling on mares. He also reported that his involvement with horses was not limited to sexual acts, but also included a strong emotional component. In his most recent offence, he inserted his arm to its full length into the vagina of a mare and punctured its vaginal wall. The horse subsequently died. The subject reported that the mare had shown an interest in a stallion, and he had killed the mare as a result of jealousy.

Assessment at the Sexual Behaviour Clinic consisted of an intake interview, coding of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, the administration of a battery of paper-and-pencil tests, and the assessment of sexual preferences, using penile plethysmography. The assessment of sexual preferences included the measure of the subject's penile responses while he was exposed to the following three sets of standardized visual or audio stimuli: (1) slides depicting males and females varying in age, from children to adults (Laws & Osborne, 1983); (2) audiotapes depicting mutually consenting and violent sexual (rape) interactions (Earls & Proulx, 1986); and (3) audiotapes describing a variety of sexual interactions (both violent and non-violent) with children aged 8–12 years (Barsetti, Earls, Lalumière, & Bélanger, 1998). Because of the nature of the subject's criminal history, a fourth stimulus set was also presented. This stimulus set consisted of slides showing farm animals such as dogs, cats, sheep, chickens, cows, and horses. There were three examples of each species. The subject provided consent for the use of his data for research purposes.

RESULTS

The assessment indicated a *DSM-IV* diagnosis of Bestiality (Paraphilia Not Otherwise Specified) on Axis I and Antisocial Personality Disorder on Axis II. The subject obtained a moderate score on the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (19 out of a possible total of 40). His intellectual functioning was below average (WAIS Full IQ of 80).

Phallometric testing using the standardized stimulus sets showed minimal arousal to all stimulus categories involving men, women, or children. All of the responses were below 1 mm of penile circumference change. When presented with the stimulus set depicting farm animals, all of the responses were below 1 mm of penile circumference change, with the exception of his response to horses. The average arousal to horses was 4.3 mm of penile circumference change. The subject was offered treatment (including such components as aversion therapy and relapse prevention) but refused.

DISCUSSION

This subject appears to meet all three criteria for zoophilia outlined above. First, he reported repeated sexual interactions with animals (mares) accompanied by strong sexual arousal. Second, he seemed to choose sexual interactions with mares even when willing human partners were available. Finally, he exhibited greater phallometrically measured sexual arousal to images of members of a nonhuman species than to images of humans. This greater arousal was specific to horses, because the subject did not show arousal to pictures of other nonhuman species. As far as we know, this is the first time this has been demonstrated in the sexological literature.

We expect cases of preferential bestiality to be extremely rare. Even behaviors and fantasies involving animals are quite rare. In a survey of the sexual fantasies of heterosexual men during sexual intercourse, 5.3% reported *sometimes* having fantasies involving sexual activities with an animal, and none reported having these fantasies *often*. This fantasy was ranked 44th out of 46 in frequency (Crépault & Couture, 1980). More frequently experienced fantasies included a “scene where your penis penetrates an immense vagina” and a “scene where you think you have another body.” Alvarez and Freinhar (1991) obtained similar results, although they found a fairly higher prevalence of sexual fantasies (30%) and behaviors (45%) involving animals in a small sample of psychiatric patients. Story (1982) reported that 14 out of 186 university students (50% male) surveyed in 1974 and 1980 had ever had sexual contact with an animal. Finally, Miller and Knutson (1997) recently found that only 29 out of 299 inmates (85% males) anonymously reported having sexually touched an animal or having sexual intercourse with an animal.

Many authors, past and current, have observed that individuals who frequently engage in sexual behaviors with animals have some kind of cognitive impairment (Duffield, Hassiotis, & Vizard, 1998). Although these observations require formal testing, they are consistent with results linking another paraphilia, pedophilia, with lower intellectual functioning (Blanchard et al., 1999).

The findings of the present case study suggest that psychophysiological laboratories assessing sexual preferences should keep a set of stimuli designed to detect sexual arousal to nonhuman animals. Although it will not be possible in the immediate future to establish the discriminative validity of such a stimulus set, the presentation of these stimuli offer the potential to refine the diagnosis of suspected cases of zoophilia. We also suggest that evaluators include, as part of gathering the sexual history information, questions about sexual fantasies and behaviors involving animals.

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